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Habitat III thematic meeting on public spaces

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) hereby transmits the outcome document of the Habitat III thematic meeting on public spaces, held in Barcelona, Spain, on 4 and 5 April 2016.

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Outcome document of the Habitat III thematic meeting on public spaces

Barcelona Declaration

We, the participants in the Habitat III thematic meeting on public spaces, representing a wide range of stakeholders, including national, regional and local governments, organizations of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, academic and research institutions, workers and trade unions, the private sector, social and solidarity enterprises, community-based organizations, philanthropies, women and youth organizations, while thanking the municipality of Barcelona for hosting the event, propose that the following Declaration be considered and included as an essential input to the process towards the preparation of a New Urban Agenda, to be adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), to be held in Quito in October 2016.

We recall the outcomes of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which provides a focus on cities through Goal 11 and the specific target on public spaces (target 11.7), as well as other interlinked goals and targets across the whole agenda and the recently adopted Paris Agreement on climate change.

We welcome in particular the acknowledgement of the importance of public spaces to achieve sustainable development in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through established target 11.7, which states that by 2030 we should "provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities".

We acknowledge with satisfaction the considerable attention that has been devoted to the concept of public spaces in the preparatory process, including the issue paper on public spaces and the report of Policy Unit 6, entitled "Urban spatial strategies: land market and segregation", all of which concur with the following definition of public spaces: "Public spaces are all places, including streets, publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive".

We advocate for a central role of public spaces in the New Urban Agenda, as they are a key driver to achieve our collective aspiration for more sustainable, just and democratic cities and human settlements for all temporary and permanent inhabitants and users of the city, whether they live there legally or informally.

We stress that:

- Human rights are key to advancing and developing urbanization that is sustainable and socially inclusive, promotes equality, combats discrimination in all its forms and empowers individuals and communities. The New Urban Agenda is a unique opportunity for State authorities at all levels to realize the human rights of all inhabitants
- The right to the city is a new paradigm that provides an alternative framework to rethink cities and urbanization. It envisions the effective exercise of all

internationally agreed human rights, the achievement of the sustainable development objectives as expressed through the Sustainable Development Goals and the fulfilment of the commitments of the Habitat Agenda

- There is a need to preserve the character and quality of existing historical public areas, in order to promote local identity and to transmit the heritage to future generations; to improve existing public areas in central and peripheral parts of the city, in order to upgrade their quality and foster the sense of belonging of the communities; and to design new public spaces in built areas and in new urban expansions, in order to increase the quality of life of the inhabitants and strengthen social stability.

Why public space?

In an ever more urbanized world, the right to the city must be guaranteed to the people who presently share the urban space and to the coming generations who are going to inherit it. This means it is necessary to have urban planning and public policies capable of producing more mixed and compact cities and human settlements marked by gender and social justice. Compactness and mixture make them fairer and more sustainable and therefore better prepared for facing erosions to the right to the city, such as gentrification, spatial segregation or sprawl. Urban public space is not only the setting in which these erosions become more evident; it is also the place from which they can be staunchly reverted with greater firmness. However, in order for the public space to respond to its true purpose and be at the service of the people and achieve the democratization of our cities, it should be tackled from an integrated perspective, which goes beyond its own physical boundaries and address fundamental dimensions such as (1) "agora" (its social and political dimension), (2) economy, (3) mobility and (4) housing.

1. Agora (social and political dimension)

Accessibility and inclusivity

- Public spaces should be free of charge and free from physical, legal and architectural barriers that discourage the presence of homeless and low-income people (preventive or dissuasive design) and make it difficult for people with reduced mobility to circulate, for the full exercise of their rights and freedoms
- It is important to ensure access to natural zones, waterfronts or heritage sites
- Public spaces enable the population to remain engaged with and to stake a claim to the city. This implies respect for and protection of a number of rights and freedoms, such as the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, information, consultation and participation in decision-making processes
- Public spaces may be places where social tensions are exacerbated or where harassment, threats and violence can occur. Not only do the root causes of these issues need to be addressed but also the elements of public spaces (for example, lights) need to be designed in consultation with the inhabitants, especially women, children, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, and youth. Moreover, proximity relations, or positive social relations and community control strongly contribute to the enhancement of citizens' security and its perception.

Versatility

- Public spaces should be versatile to enable multiple use and access, facilitated, among other things, by translations of public and commercial signs for ethnic minorities
- Empty and neutral areas can be better adapted to neighbourhood appropriation or the possibility of hosting extraordinary community-based events
- Public spaces can represent an alternative to temporary shelter and provide space for evacuation in case of emergency. This should be considered particularly given climate change and migration issues.

Quality design, environmental and human scale

- Public spaces should reflect a human scale, territorial distribution and a degree of integration with the immediate surroundings that fosters their everyday use, maintenance, security and safety for all
- The design process should be a co-production of stakeholders' input and include physical, cultural and social identities that define a place
- Public spaces design can contribute with many co-benefits to minimize the impact of cities on the global climate system, both through mitigation measures (energy savings and resource efficiency in public services) and adaptation measures (green and blue grids, infrastructure, heat wave control). It can more generally lead to the better resilience of cities
- Public spaces are key to protect urban biodiversity, in particular through the promotion of ecological continuities.

Distribution and integration

- Capillary distribution of public spaces at all scales in the urban territory is also important. All neighbourhoods should have suitable public spaces and green areas for recreation and social interaction at a reasonable distance from home. Far from only being free and open areas, public spaces have a complex spatial nature that includes porches, underground areas and closed buildings. Integration with other physical elements of the city, such as municipal facilities, public infrastructure housing and commerce, should be pursued
- The street and the house are interrelated spaces. Friendlier and safer public spaces are those that reflect a greater level of participation and appropriation by neighbours. Accordingly, a visual and circulatory relation between domestic spaces and open places is fundamental
- Public infrastructures (railway and metro stations, markets and treatment plants) should transcend mono-functional specialization and take on a sufficient degree of complexity so as to become spaces of social interaction with a pedagogical function
- An adequate and well-connected network of streets and other public spaces, particularly in new urban expansions and at the time of urban transformation, should be secured, considering that successful, dense, mixed cities in general allocate 35 to 50 per cent of urban land to public space. This will require the

adoption of legislation on replotting and land readjustment to acquire suitable public land.

Recreation and health

- Public spaces should provide equal opportunities for enjoying indoor/outdoor spaces and promote healthy practices and sustainable consumption and production patterns in harmony with nature. They should contribute to the well-being of people in vulnerable situations (including children, older persons, the homeless, the sick and people with disabilities, and irregular migrants) and facilitate a more equitable distribution of duties that traditionally have fallen mainly on the shoulders of women within the domestic field.

Cultural and political expression

- Public spaces can create the environment to dispel the myths and destructive stereotypes associated with migration by fostering public debate about the varied and overwhelmingly positive contributions of migrants to local communities
- Far from threatening their natural or heritage values, public access to conservation-oriented or fragile areas allows people to fully get to know, value and defend them, which in itself is a greater guarantee of their preservation
- Public spaces and municipal educational and cultural facilities (schools, libraries, civic centres and museums) have a pedagogical function that is essential for democracy and social transformation, contributing to the construction of a critical, committed and well-informed citizenship. The pedagogical function, which should foster critical debate and avoid indoctrination, should be fully promoted and pervade any public space.

Conflict resolution and cohabitation

- Public spaces are where dialogues and confrontations take place defining the mechanisms to enable conflicts to evolve and be solved, between users, particularly in the complex multicultural cities, so that such spaces are able to bring their added value to different groups and needs.

Governance

- The quantity and quality of public spaces can be guaranteed through proper urban governance mechanisms and by developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels and ensuring inclusive and participatory decision-making
- Public spaces require a legal and policy framework at the central level that both enables local authorities to effectively implement national urban policies and empowers them as policymakers benefiting from a sufficient level of autonomy in decision-making in accordance with their competences
- The resulting multi-level governance system requires political commitment from all echelons of Government for an efficient and effective share of functional assignments for coordination and cooperation. Such a policy should

be shaped through a transparent and participatory process involving — beyond national, subnational and local authorities — all relevant non-State actors, such as non-governmental organizations, citizens and the private sector.

2. **Economy**

Sustainability and democratic control of basic urban supplies and waste

- Promote the mainstreaming of social and solidarity economy in all sectors as an inclusive, viable human rights-based economic alternative and key lever for the future cities
- Establish mechanisms for the redistribution of increases in property value brought about by good public spaces in the case of housing, commercial or production uses, and to prevent solely private capture, by introducing fair taxation and site- and citywide redistribution of gains with the aim of increasing equity and social development and ensuring the contribution of landowners to urban development
- Public spaces should include governance that ensures the preservation of territorial, peri-urban and urban land for food production by small-scale food producers from real estate speculation
- In order to better integrate cities and mitigate climate change, the democratization, municipalization, transparency and sustainable production and management of energy, water, and telecommunications provision, as well as municipally managed access to urban waste and sanitation, should be a right for all inhabitants, including migrants
- Foster micro-, small- and medium-scale economic activities, both formal and informal, with specific attention to integrating urban spaces with rural and natural spaces and revitalizing unproductive spaces in order to improve the livelihoods of local producers and workers, including those in the informal sectors
- Introduce regulatory frameworks that guarantee the territorial balance in urban-rural linkages through public space networks, as the basis for economical systems.

Balance production of wealth and responsible consumption

- Promote responsible local sustainable production and consumption, social interactions, as well as vibrant, inclusive and diverse public spaces by enabling accessible networks of municipal markets, local commerce, street vendors and waste pickers
- The public character of public spaces needs to be guaranteed and their privatization avoided even if the use remains public, especially referring to streets and built environment open spaces such as squares. Worldwide trends at different scales set this issue as a priority, highlighting the need for a mutual positive relation between public and private spaces, including housing and residential blocks

- A new form of partnership, where people and stakeholders have the right to access and participate in the process, is needed as well as the formulation of stricter regulations against the privatization of public spaces
- Reiterate multisectoral cooperation on cross-cutting issues such as labour, land-use and food and foster public spaces, including effective governance to ensure the preservation of territorial, peri-urban and urban land for food production by small-scale food producers. Ensure adequate infrastructure connecting small-scale producers to local markets.

3. **Mobility**

Change of paradigm towards a post-car city

- There is the need for a paradigm shift from a private-car-based mobility model to more democratic, climate-oriented and sustainable mobility, boosting efficient modes of transport, including considering the modal split of the daily journeys. Cultural policies on and awareness-raising about the effects of the massive use of private motorized vehicles on health, productivity, sustainability and equity should be promoted.

Fostering walkability and bicycle use in a more human public space

- Promoting walkability and cycling is a key measure to bring people into the public space, reduce congestion and boost the local economy and interactions, as well as improve safety in cities. Walkability helps to reduce reliance on automobiles and alleviate congestion, air pollution and resource depletion
- Walkable public spaces and public spaces for cycling, designed on a human scale, are effective tools for women-, children- and age-friendly cities, increasing livability and enjoyment.

Implementing democratic and sustainable public transport networks

- Public policies and urban planning must foster public transport as a structural way to promote more democratic and sustainable mobility. Public transport must have a good spatial and temporal distribution and must be affordable and accessible to everybody. It must be intermodal and its infrastructures must have a balanced relation with the neighbourhoods it crosses and not create big barriers
- Develop urban planning capacity to make strategic public space plans at the scale of the city, the districts and the street level, which respond in a transversal way to the urban challenges of mobility, ecology and social issues
- Define planning measures and rules that guarantee in a quantitative way the creation of accessible public spaces for all, with priority to pedestrian and cycling mobility, as being part of a vibrant and diverse living environment.

4. **Housing**

Right to adequate housing

- Access to quality public spaces for all should be strengthened as an essential component of the definition of the right to adequate housing, which currently

includes security of tenure, affordability, accessibility, location, cultural adequacy and security of and access to water, sanitation and electricity

- The provision of quality public spaces can greatly improve housing conditions both in the existing urban setting and in newly developed extensions, with particular regard to the needs of vulnerable groups, including people living in informal settlements
- Social housing with quality public spaces should become the norm rather than the exception in cities. Instead of being limited to distant and peripheral locations, it should be distributed in all parts of the city, with priority to urban renewal, in order to counteract gentrification and, in specific contexts, excessive "touristification".

Social function of land, property and city

- Policies and interventions should promote alternative housing options, shifting from predominantly private ownership to rentals, and tenure diversity, including such cooperative solutions as co-housing and community land trust, enhanced by the provision of adequate public spaces
- Access to quality public spaces for all is threatened by two opposite phenomena, the appropriation of public spaces as a result of gentrification and the privatization of public spaces as a result of exclusive housing development and gated communities
- The worldwide speculative escalation of rental prices in the most attractive locations transforms the city and its public spaces into deserts through the expulsion and eviction of its inhabitants, communities and small formal and informal businesses. Regulation of the private market, rent control and the discouragement of empty housing can counteract the foregoing and promote the social function of the property
- Land and housing, especially when equipped with quality public spaces, are very valuable assets. Therefore, they should be subjected to fair taxation and value capture mechanisms. These revenues should be redistributed to less privileged neighbourhoods according to principles of urban solidarity.

Housing policies and tools

- Housing policies need to foster local integrated housing approaches by meeting the needs of people and addressing the strong links between education, employment, housing and health, and by aiming at desegregation. In the same way, they need to ensure security of tenure, including preventing forced evictions and displacements, and guarantee the provision of dignified and adequate reallocation by corporate landlords and public authorities in case of eviction by individual landlords. Dedicated human rights-based strategies and policies and social protection are needed to tackle homelessness as comprehensive and sustainable housing first programmes, with measurable goals and timelines, and in an inclusive manner.

We conclude that in order to have more democratic cities, namely fairer and more sustainable ones, we need to develop public policies and urban planning that best foster more compact and mixed urban fabrics in which:

- [Agoras] Freedom, gender equality, equity and diversity of expression, transparency, pedagogy, a culture of civic and critical engagement, as well as binding participation and accountability pave the way for the democratic co-production of urban space, for all inhabitants, whether temporary or permanent, living in legal or illegal conditions
- [Economy] Opportunities to participate in the common wealth and the democratization of economic activities are ensured to include small-scale operators and local producers
- [Mobility] Dependence on private cars, with its catastrophic consequences for health, equity, climate change, waste of energy, urban sprawl and spatial segregation, is replaced by walkability, cycling and public transport
- [Housing] The right to adequate, affordable and sustainable housing is guaranteed simultaneously with the right to a diverse and well-located neighbourhood.

These four fields are universal because they concern cities all around the world. That is why local governments have to be provided with sufficient resources in order to address them properly and to be able to guarantee human rights and the right to the city.

Finally, we commit ourselves to promote the principles and the recommendations included in the present Barcelona Declaration for Habitat III, ensuring that this effectively contributes to the formulation of the New Urban Agenda at the next United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, to be held in Quito in October 2016.